

unions and strikes. Could any stuff be more inflammable material for the agitator than such a class ?

But the Black Death had accelerated other important revolutions besides that of raising the free labourer's wage and status. We have already noticed that the commutation of the villeins' feudal services for money had gone some way before 1348. The reduction of population by the plague hastened the process. It hastened it, no doubt, against the landlords' wishes ; for when labour was dearer than before, labour services due from tenants were worth more than ever. But the landlord was no longer in a position to do what he liked even with his own villeins, to such a pass had things come. It was with the greatest difficulty that hands could be kept on an estate at all. Like the free labourer, the villein had now the whiphand of his master. If the lord refused to commute his services for money rent, and still continued to exact the day labour which had now become so far more valuable than of old, the villein, like the free labourer, could \* flee.' To retire off the estate to another part of the country was forbidden to the free labourer only by the Statute of 1350 ; but in the case of the villein ' bound to the soil,' it was a breach of immemorial custom and the ancient law of the land. Yet the ' nights ' of villeins form as marked a feature in the later fourteenth century, as the ' nights' of negroes from the slave States of America in the early nineteenth. The one was as definitely illegal as the other, and in both cases the frequency of the flights marked the thorough determination of the class to set itself free and to revolutionise the old state of things. But instead of finding the whole country against him, the fugitive villein, whether he escaped to city or village, was sure of a welcome from merchants and bailiffs whose business, in consequence of the Black Death, was being ruined by lack of hands. The master from whom he had fled would learn too late that it was impossible to replace his lost services, or to fill his deserted toft. It is not therefore surprising that the lords were compelled to make every concession in order to retain their serfs on their estates. So far from trying to revive obligations that had been previously commuted, we find them parting with